

Balancing Program Fidelity and Adaptation for School-Based Programs

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In our current work for SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, we've identified 12 key steps needed to implement an evidence-based substance abuse prevention program with proper attention to balancing fidelity and adaptation. Taken together, these key steps also fit with what we know about how to transfer technology of any sort. There's now more than 80 years of work in education, health and human services, and many other fields about effecting technology transfer, which boils down to four fundamental elements:

- (a) *Having good evidence about an innovation's effectiveness.*
- (b) *Communicating about the innovation in user-friendly terms.*
- (c) *Mobilizing the financial and human resources needed to implement the innovation.*
- (d) *Dealing with all the human issues related to the change that will come with implementation.*

What follows is a brief summary chart presenting these 12 key steps to deal with the specific issues of balancing program fidelity and adaptation. These are described in much more detail in a forthcoming CSAP publication, *Finding the Balance: An Implementer's Guide to Program Fidelity and Adaptation*. We'd welcome your becoming a reviewer of this document in its draft form - please contact us for details about how to do so.

Additional resources for learning about these topics, including aspects related to schools, include:

Backer, T.E. (2001) *Finding the balance - program fidelity and adaptation in substance abuse prevention: A state-of-the-art review*. Rockville, MD: Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Available at <http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/modelprograms/pdfs/FindingBalance1.pdf>.

Backer, T.E. (2000). The failure of success: Challenges of disseminating effective substance abuse prevention programs. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(3), 363-373

Cummins, M. et al (2003). *Assessing program fidelity and adaptations*. Newton, MA: Education Development Center.

Hall, G.E. & Hord, S.M. (2001). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, potholes*. New York: Allyn & Bacon.

Rohrbach, L.A., D'Onofrio, C.N., Backer, T.E. & Montgomery, S.B. (1996). Diffusion of school-based substance abuse prevention programs. *American Behavioral Scientist* 39(7), 919-934.

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Key Steps for Finding the Balance Between Program Fidelity and Adaptation

ASSESS community needs and assets related to substance abuse prevention

- 1 - CHOOSE DEFINITION of fidelity/adaptation balance, and share your definition with everybody who's collaborating on the program's implementation.*
- 2 - ASSESS INITIAL COMMUNITY CONCERNS about fidelity/adaptation issues with everybody who's collaborating on the program's implementation.*
- 3 - Conduct a DUE DILIGENCE REVIEW of the program to identify fidelity/adaptation challenges more precisely.*
- 4 - Examine SCIENCE-BASED ELEMENTS of the program to increase understanding of fidelity/adaptation issues - its theory of change, logic model and core components.*

BUILD community capacity to implement a program successfully

- 5 - Determine what RESOURCES may be needed to deal with fidelity/adaptation issues, and how to present need for these resources to funders.*
- 6 - Look at what INITIAL TRAINING the program developer or others offer that might help you address fidelity/adaptation issues.*
- 7 - Define how you'll DOCUMENT fidelity/adaptation aspects of program implementation, including possible use of Pathways to Effective Programs and Positive Outcomes and/or a fidelity instrument.*
- 8 - Determine whether an individualized TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE on fidelity/adaptation issues, by the program developer or others, might be feasible and useful.*
- 9 - INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY in addressing the fidelity/adaptation issues you've identified.*

SELECT the evidence-based program that's right for a community, and get it (and the community) ready for implementation

- 10 - Weave results from all these steps into a PLAN FOR ADDRESSING FIDELITY/ADAPTATION BALANCE, and make this part of your overall implementation plan.*

IMPLEMENT the program, and get ready to evaluate it

- 11 - Include fidelity/adaptation issues in designing the EVALUATION strategy for this implementation of the program.*

COMPLETE EVALUATION, and promote long-term sustainability of the program when appropriate

- 12- Set in place an ONGOING PROCESS for addressing fidelity/adaptation issues that are likely to come up after the program has been implemented, and throughout its lifetime in the new setting.*